

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO EVIDENCE



By the end of this section you will be able to define and apply data and evidence to various contexts within higher education.



To extend your learning, access the Digital Glossary in the Appendix to continue to define and apply key terms.



To apply your learning, review the case studies throughout the rest of this Guide to help you consider 'real life' examples associated with the content of this section and others.

What is data and evidence in higher education?

If you are starting to think about data and evidence use in your current role or project, access Section 2 for an overview of how evidence might be used in higher education. Section 3 will provide an overview of the types of data which could inform your decision making. Thinking critically about the evidence you use and how it is collected is important – Section 4 will guide you through the questions you should ask at the beginning of a project and those you should reflect on continuously.

What is data?

Data is information collected for a specific purpose, including [research](#) and [evaluation](#).

A[method](#) is required to generate data.

These methods produce [quantitative](#) (numbers) or [qualitative](#) data (words/visuals).

A[nalysis](#) is necessary to make sense of data or data only exists as numbers or words/visuals.

There are a variety of data sources in higher education which can be analysed to help you explore a topic area or identified problem ([secondary data analysis](#)). Section 5 provides detail of existing data sources which you may want to access. In contrast, you may want to collect your own data using a suitable methodology ([primary data collection](#)). Section 6 discusses how you can choose the best method and design your own data collection tools.

What is evidence?



Evidence brings together the analysis of your chosen data to answer a specific question. More than one source of data can be analysed to produce evidence. **Triangulating** data can provide a more robust evidence base and can strengthen any conclusions you are making. This would include identifying any data gaps or outliers in the evidence.

Section 7 is designed to support you with the communication of your evidence and contains checklists and reflective questions to ask yourself in 'evidencing the evidence'. The final section - Section 8 - focuses on impact and ongoing action and is designed to summarise and utilise all the content and learning from the previous seven sections. It is highly recommended that all previous sections are completed before engaging with this section.



Evidence Essentials One

Collating evidence is not always a logical or linear process. Data sources may not neatly corroborate and may even contrast each other. To make sense of your data landscape, spend some time reflecting on the process and the outcome. Evidence can include notes of unintended outcomes of the research/evaluation and personal reflections of the researcher/s. Once a conclusion has been reached, it is also important to state any limitations in the evidence base.



References and further Reading

Creative Arts Cluster (2018) (Collaborative authorship: Gunn, V, Mackay, J, Schrag, A, O'Neill, S, Bennett, S, Miller Judd, P, Kanhye, R, Cambell, A and Sexon, S) Scoping the Creative Arts Territory in the Scottish Context: Teaching Enhancements, Evidence Development, and the Interconnections with the Cultural Ecology of Scotland. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

Spence, C W (2019). 'Judgement' versus 'metrics' in higher education management. *Higher Education*, May 2019, 77(5): pp761–775.

Trowler, V, Trowler, P and Saunders, M (2018) *Responding to Student Voice: Insights into international practice*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.